

## Message Text

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43

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 IO-14 DRC-01 /146 W

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R 151650Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 926

INFO AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

ANCONSUL TANGIER

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, TS, LY

SUBJ: GOM REACTION TO TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER ANNOUNCEMENT

1. GOM HAS GREETED ANNOUNCEMENT OF TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER WITH FLURRY OF ACTIVITY. SHORTLY AFTER ANNOUNCEMENT, KING HASSAN DISPATCHED MINISTER OF STATE BAHNINI AND FOREIGN MINISTER BENHIMA TO ALGIERS TO CONFER WITH PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE, AND THE TWO RETURNED TO RABAT IN TIME TO REPORT TO KING AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS ON EVENING JAN 14. KING AND BOUMEDIENE HAD BEEN IN CONTACT BY TELEPHONE. ACCORDING TO MOROCCAN RADIO, CALL WAS AT BOUMEDIENE'S INITIATIVE. PRESS ALSO REPORTED THAT TUNISIAN DELEGATION MADE UP OF HABIB CHATTI AND INTERIOR MINISTER BELKHODJA HAD MET IN ALGIERS WITH ALGERIAN OFFICIALS AND WITH BAHNINI AND BENHIMA. CHATTI AND BELKHODJA WERE TO HAVE GONE ON TO RABAT ACCORDING TO AFP REPORT, BUT THIS TRIP APPARENTLY DELAYED BY THEIR RECALL

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TO TUNIS FOLLOWING CHATTI'S APPOINTMENT TO HEAD FOREIGN MINISTRY. FINALLY, PRESS REPORTS JAN 15 THAT ALGERIAN

FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTEFLIKA WILL COME TO RABAT AT HEAD OF A DELEGATION.

2. FOLLOWING BAHNINI'S AND BENHIMA'S REPORT TO KING, MINISTER OF INFORMATION ISSUED COMMUNIQUE NOTING THAT CABINET HAD EXPRESSED QUOTE SURPRISE AT THE GRAVE EVENT UNQUOTE REPRESENTED BY PROPOSED MERGER. COMMUNIQUE ALSO STRESSED MOROCCO'S BELIEF IN MAGHREB UNITY BUT SAID THAT UNION SHOULD BE REALIZED IN BEST CIRCUMSTANCES. HASTE AND IMPROVISATION BOUND TO BLOCK SUCCESS AND COULD EVEN LEAD UNION TO QUOTE DISMAL FAILURE AND SURE DEATH UNQUOTE (FBIS L150018).

3. IN VERY NEGATIVE EDITORIAL JAN 15, MOULAY AHMED ALAOUI, PUBLISHER OF SEMI-OFFICIAL "LE MATIN" AND "MAROC SOIR," SAID THAT RELATIVELY PROGRESSIVE TU\*ISIA WOULD BE SUBMERGED BY REGRESSIVE, OBSCURANTIST LIBYA AND THAT THE NATURAL SOLIDARITY OF THE MAGHREB WOULD BE HURT BY THE INTRODUCTION OF THE AGITATION AND SUBVERSION WHICH ARE PART AND PARCEL OF QADHAFI REGIME. BOTH PAPERS ALSO FEATURED SKEPTICAL WORLD PRESS (INCLUDING TUNISIAN) REACTION AND CARRIED EXCERPTS FROM BOURGUIBA SPEECH ON OCCASION QADHAFI'S VISIT TO TUNIS IN DECEMBER 1972 IN WHICH BOURGUIBA STRESSED NEED TO PROCEED SLOWLY TOWARDS UNITY. ISTIQLALI "AL ALAM" SAID AGREEMENT COULD BE SUBSTITUTE FOR MAGHREB UNITY OR FOR STALLED EGYPTIAN-LIBYAN MERGER, OR STEP TOWARDS MAGHREB UNITY, INCLUDING ALL TERRITORY BETWEEN EGYPT AND MOROCCO. PAPER HOPED IT WAS START IN DIRECTION OF MAGHREB UNITY WHICH SHOULD INVOLVE, AS PLANNED EARLIER, THE FOUR COUNTRIES OF THE REGION. (ISTIQLAL PREFERS TO IGNORE EXISTENCE OF MAURITANIA.)

4. COMMENT: KING APPARENTLY MUCH EXERCISED BY MERGER ANNOUNCEMENT. WE HAVE HEARD FROM TUNISIAN SOURCE THAT DEPARTURE FOR TUNIS OF NEWLY DESIGNATED MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR GHALI BENHIMA, FOR MOMENT AT LEAST, HAS BEEN DELAYED. BENHIMA HAD BEEN DUE TO LEAVE EARLY THIS WEEK. FACED WITH UNWELCOME DEVELOPMENT, KING STRESSING EXISTENCE OF HIS ALGERIAN CONNECTION, A CONNECTION WHICH HAS BEEN BADLY STRAINED OF LATE.

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